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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 CAIRO 000448

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/15/2019  
TAGS: [PREL](#) [MASS](#) [PARM](#) [KPAL](#) [IS](#) [EG](#)  
SUBJECT: EGYPTIAN COUNTER SMUGGLING EFFORTS

REF: A. CAIRO 161  
[1](#)B. CAIRO 290  
[1](#)C. CAIRO 160

Classified By: Ambassador Margaret Scobey per 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. Key Points

-- (S) Egypt continues to improve efforts to combat arms smuggling into Gaza, but a decision by Field Marshal Tantawi to delay a counter tunneling project threatens progress.

-- (S) During a March 10 meeting, Tantawi informed the Ambassador that the GOE is unwilling to allow the satellite connection necessary to calibrate the FMF-provided sensors currently being installed along the Rafah border to detect tunneling activity. Tantawi claimed potential criticism from the opposition of U.S. control over the Egyptian border fueled his decision.

-- (S) The Ambassador urged Tantawi to reconsider and also pressed Foreign Minister Aboul Gheit to push for maintaining the satellite link to avoid an unnecessary four-five month delay to develop alternative technological solutions.

-- (S) Tantawi has also objected to enabling the GPS technology needed to accurately pinpoint tunneling activity.

-- (S) Despite Post's efforts, MOD informed OMC Chief on March 15 that Tantawi's decision was final and asked to amend the FMF case to move forward without the satellite link or GPS technology.

-- (S) A technical team of U.S. experts visited Egypt March 8-12 to assess EGIS's request for X-ray screening systems to inspect vehicles entering the Sinai for weapons and explosives. The team visited seven of the eight requested sites and EGIS appears committed to installing permanent screening systems at the soonest possible time.

-- (S) EGIS declined the loan of mobile screening systems, believing that permanent systems were a better technical option and said they would increase manual inspections until a permanent system could be installed. The team agreed that temporary mobile systems were not the optimum technical solution and could delay implementation of the permanent systems.

-- (S) Post encourages the Department to provide timely funding for the procurement of as many fixed screening systems as possible. Deploying a limited number of screening systems will only shift smuggling routes to Sinai crossings without the systems.

-- (S) Other operational action to combat smuggling includes an MOD project to construct a subterranean steel wall along the Egypt-Gaza border, an increased civilian police presence in northern Sinai, and increased vehicle inspections at

security checkpoints entering the Sinai.

12. (S) Comment: EGIS appears committed to increasing counter smuggling operations, especially through additional security procedures - like the screening systems - to stop weapons and explosives before they enter the Sinai. This amplified focus on combating smuggling further afield than the border is critical to stemming the flow of weapons. MOD's intransigence however, threatens real progress. Tantawi's protestations of concern over the opposition's criticism are unlikely the true source of his decision. While the GOE remains deeply concerned over domestic and regional criticism that they are "supporting" the Israeli siege on Gaza by refusing to open the Rafah border to normal traffic, Tantawi had not demonstrated similar concerns over the opposition since the program began. EGIS Chief Omar Soliman will be visiting Washington this week and we recommend raising the counter tunneling project delay with him. Ultimately, however, Tantawi is unlikely to be moved by anyone other than President Mubarak.

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BTADS Delay  
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13. (S) In February, MOD informed OMC Chief that Field Marshal Tantawi wanted to sever the satellite link and discontinue the use of GPS for the FMF-provided seismic acoustic sensors being installed along the Rafah border. (Note: MOD originally agreed to the use of the satellite to calibrate the system during installation, on the condition that it was severed after installation. They understood that the sensors use GPS

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technology. End Note).

14. (S) Prior to Tantawi's decision, the counter tunneling project was going well. On January 15, MOD had agreed to accelerate the project's implementation (ref A). A 24-man Tunnel Detection Unit (TDU) of MOD engineers is already working alongside the U.S Army Corps of Engineers to install the equipment. They also discovered and - for the first time - destroyed a main tunnel (ref B) found during installation. Tantawi had also taken other steps to deter smuggling, including approving a project to construct a subterranean steel wall along the Rafah border.

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Screening Systems  
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15. (S) In January, EGIS requested U.S. assistance to provide X-ray screening systems to monitor vehicular traffic into the Sinai for weapons and explosives (ref C). A technical team of State/DHS experts visited Egypt March 8 - 12 to assess Egypt's request (septel). The team visited seven of the eight sites EGIS requested and agreed that fixed x-ray screening systems would be an appropriate tool for combating smuggling. The team discussed the possibility of the US providing a temporary loan of mobile screening vans, until permanent systems could be deployed. EGIS officials believed that mobile vans were not the appropriate technical solution and were comfortable with increasing manual inspections - which they claimed were already being done - and waiting until fixed systems could be deployed. The team agreed that temporary mobile vans were not optimum and may delay the deployment of permanent systems.  
SCOBAY